

Public Scoping Comments

Lower River Camping Management Plan

The NPS has initiated a planning process to address issues related to camping on the St. Croix River between the hydroelectric dam at Taylors Falls/St. Croix Falls and the north City limits of Stillwater. Step 1 of the planning process began with public scoping to identify the full breadth of camping related issues and solicit ideas on how to address them. To encourage public input, we distributed a newsletter that described some of the issues and asked for input. "Camping Management Plan: Newsletter 1" was provided to interested visitors at the Riverway during Summer 2003 and mailed out to a list of over 400 addresses in Fall 2003. Public scoping meetings were held in Taylors Falls and Stillwater in December 2003.

The NPS wishes to thank everyone who took the time to submit written comments and/or attend one of the public scoping meetings. The next step in the planning process will be to develop a range of alternatives for managing camping on this section of the St. Croix River. The NPS will use the public input received during scoping to develop these alternatives.

The comments received during public scoping are summarized below. We hope that you will find them as enlightening as we did.

Public Education on Camping and Outdoor Ethics

- Promote the river experience as a special wilderness experience where reverence for the land and the river are important. In the wild and scenic sections, the river is not a party place, but a place to turn to nature.
- In 2004, start a "Leave No Trace" program at the St. Croix. Use 2004 as the camping education step. In 2005 "Leave No Trace" enforced with a 1) test, 2) permit, and 3) tough enforcement.
- To inform and remind campers and boaters of the rules and common sense, maybe the NPS could distribute garbage bags at boat launches that would be printed with the rules and the basics.
- Encourage a mandate whereby canoe rental businesses provide trash bags and a brief education about the health of our environment and the obligation all people have to preserve it.
- Educate the public more on the trash problems.
- Get boat rental companies to inform novice boaters about no wake rules.
- Institute a two prong sales job to inform the public that 1) the Riverway is a quiet place with natural characteristics that should be cherished and 2) that this is our neighborhood (private landowners), please respect it.
- In addition to waste issues, we have witnessed many campers having ill-advised camp fires during dry periods.
- Use scouts for service projects
- Establish a Volunteer River Patrol Program at the Riverway to assist with visitor information and education.

Human Body Waste and Trash

- Provide all campsites with toilets, maybe a flood proof toilet needs to be designed.
- Day use sites should be within 400 yards of a “boat up” toilet.
- Provide more toilet facilities and make them convenient. Most people would use a facility instead of the ground if a toilet location were identified and convenient.
- Where primitive toilets cannot be used, place floating toilets. Floating toilets should be accessible from the island where they are moored and not require boat access.
- Locking toilets are not the way to go. You want people to use them and the only portable toilets available in stores have no locking system for their waste.
- A coffee can with a plastic lid is better than a turd in the water.
- At some campsites, port-a-potties or lug-a-loos should be mandatory. At sites where pit toilets could be placed, they would not be required.
- To solve the human waste issue a permit system for camping is warranted.
- Sanitation issues may be resolved by more portable/pumpable toilets like ones already in use around the Apple River.
- There are only two solutions to the problem of human waste on islands 1) require everyone to carry out their own waste as is done in the Grand Canyon (Colorado River) or 2) eliminate island camping replacing the sites with upland sites on shore.
- Have more floating port-a-potties or removable ones on the islands.
- Put the floating toilets back out. It is ridiculous to expect campers to go back to the marina to take a dump.
- Put the floating toilets back out at the two no wake areas.
- Need some kind of waste collection system that can be used on sandbars and floodplain woods.
- Need more toilets
- More floating toilets. Look at cheaper operations. NPS pump themselves.
- Higher volume of self-contained toilets – self sealing.
- Put out enough toilets so the walk from the campsite is a short one. Otherwise they go in the bushes. Put in well signed trails with reflective signage to the toilet.
- More floating toilets.
- How about a solar powered light at the toilets (at Mile Long and the floating toilets)
- Self-contained toilets for all campers.
- Every time we go out on the beautiful St. Croix we bring a garbage bag and without fail, we fill it every time. Just a brief list of waste we have picked up from canoeists and campers: cans, bottles, plastic bottles, paper bags, used toilet paper, paper plates, plastic eating utensils, cigarette butts, empty cigarette packs, and dirty diapers.
- We take out more garbage than we bring in.

Law Enforcement

- Devote additional resources to enforcement.
- I’ve seen heavy drinking, nudity, drugs and debauchery.
- Establish a Volunteer River Patrol Program at the Riverway to assist with visitor information and education.

- A significant portion of the east side of the lower St. Croix is in the village of Osceola, this puts a burden on the police departments in assisting the NPS.
- Lack of enforcement of existing rules.
- Very frustrated by the lack of dissemination of information on the rules for camping on the Taylors Falls to Osceola section of river, the lack of enforcement, and the tremendous increase in overnight use of the riverbanks.
- Individual has frequently informed people that they are camping in illegal areas, but is mostly ignored.
- A conversation about camping management may be irrelevant if issues of enforcement are not addressed at the same time.
- I think if there were river patrols going around telling people to pick up their waste and taking boat licenses, occasional campers who stay up late, make a lot of noise etc. would be stopped.
- Another problem with camping is late night partying.
- It is common to find campers in illegal areas, especially on weekends. Some have even removed the no camping signs.
- If a fine for illegal camping were imposed and actually implemented, there would likely be fewer incidences of illegal camping and damage.
- Have spot check to see if campers pick up trash.
- Increase patrols on the weekends and holidays.
- More rangers. Better enforcement of existing regulations.
- Alcohol (there is too much drinking on river).
- More NPS presence and information on rules.
- More visibility of park staff.
- Rental boaters aren't river-smart. They need to get information on rules and regulations.
- Enforce rules we have now regarding boat speed and water skiing.

Rules and Regulations

- Most campers and boaters are trying to do what is right.
- Please work towards informing rather than restricting.
- Address any camping issues without additional regulations. More rules don't solve problems, they complicate the experience, cost taxpayers as an attempt is made to enforce them, and create an illusion that the issues are fixed because of the additional rules.
- Camping regulation changes appear necessary.
- I see more restrictions. Where in all your pages of rules in the rule for the uses of fun and enjoyment.
- I would like to see more regulations that protect the wild and scenic characteristics of the river south of Taylors Falls. I am especially concerned about the amount of raw sewage that enters the river.
- It's working fine, don't mess it up with more camping rules.
- No more regulations. Repeal the scenic riverway program south of Taylors Falls and dissolve the WiDNR.

- Way too much regulation. The river is to use and enjoy for all taxpayers and boaters of all sorts, pleasure-power driven, sailboats, canoe, fishing campers etc.
- Seems like people in control have their own agenda and do not listen to the majority, skewed to no motors, no camping, canoes only. I'm writing my politicians to complain.
- Try to find ways to reduce the NPS involvement and allow the citizenry to make their own decisions.
- Please make sure that a few do not ruin a great experience for the many.
- I am not happy to be told rules and regulations when I am trying to soak up some sun.
- Hate to see it become designated with all the restrictions.

Resource Damage including Island and Shoreline Erosion

- Over recent (10) years water levels are higher than normal throughout much of the summer. The higher than normal water levels and the stronger currents have caused most of the erosion of islands and shorelines.
- To allow some additional vegetation growth on the main channel side of the island, provide a navigable channel to the backwater side of the island so boaters can beach there.
- The riverbank at the gap into the sloughs above Osceola has retreated as a result of camping pressure.
- Heavy use of some favored camping areas has led to shoreline erosion, over browsing for wood, ground and water pollution from lack of toilet facilities, pileups of cans and garbage.
- My biggest concern is island erosion which is mostly caused by high water. It's being blamed on boat traffic, but that's not all the problem.
- Limiting boat size and speed north of Stillwater would be part of the long-term effort to preserve this river.
- Concerned about destruction of habitat, human waste, trash, overuse causing erosion, power boats not following no wake, noise, and lack of respect for wildlife.
- Enforce the no wake areas.
- Buried trash is being exposed from years ago.
- Damage to live trees.
- Institute 15 mph or slow/no wake above Stillwater.
- Regulate speed for less than 0.4-foot wake. No plowing.
- Start no wake zone near Stillwater Bridge.
- Need beaver trapping to slow down erosion.
- Make it no wake from Wolf's Marina north.
- No wake when water level is too high to matter.

Conflicts between campers and private landowners

- Conflicts between campers and private landowners are not the NPS's problem. It is a trespassing problem between the private landowner and the trespasser. It is the responsibility of the private landowner to properly post their property as private.

- The island areas south of the Soo Line swing bridge are privately owned. The public must be informed that camping, littering, and defecating etc. on these private islands and floodplain area constitutes criminal trespass.
- We need more enforcement. Those with land on the river shouldn't have to defend private property rights all summer.
- The prohibition on camping until 1000 feet below Franconia Landing is not being enforced.
- My cabin along the river has been broken into and vandalized a number of times, would not like any additional traffic in area, by foot or canoe.
- Private landowners face problems with unauthorized camping - - trash, noise, human waste, trespassing, ignorance of people who think that all of the land belongs to the NPS.
- For those who live along the river, the noise from parties and fireworks on weekends detracts from enjoying the view.
- Several years ago someone camped just across the river from my home and brought a chain saw to cut down trees. We endured hours and hours of late night partying, screaming and the like.
- In 1976, after great protestation, I was forced to sell my property to the NPS to create the Riverway. Since then there has been an unbelievable increase in use of the river bringing destruction of wildlife such as blue herons, frogs, clams, and wildflowers. In addition, refuse is left everywhere.
- Families with land along the river prior to establishment of the Riverway realized that it was the best thing for the river and entrusted the NPS with their treasure.
- Our family sold our land and agreed to easements with the NPS as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act because we thought it was the best thing for the river. It has been disheartening to experience the degradation of the quality of our life and the river, having given up our land and entrusting it to the government to protect.
- The volume of campers and others that rent canoes and urinate, defecate, leave trash and intend to camp on my property has surged.
- I don't think the St. Croix should be only for the people who are lucky enough to have homes on the shore.

Campsite Demand and River Use

- The increase in trash, boats, canoes and campers exceeds sustainability and the resources dedicated to enforce and protect.
- I have not seen monopolizing of sites as a problem.
- There are existing rules that define the maximum stay that sufficiently address this issue. Limit the stay on one spot to 1 week.
- I have seen many boaters who spend the whole month of July on one spot. It is not fair to "hog" an island like that.
- Camping pressure in some spots comes pretty much from one family.
- Some equip campsites with all but concrete deer for lawn ornaments for extended stays.
- Usage of the river has increased between Interstate and Osceola. There is definitely more boat traffic and a huge amount of canoe rental usage.

- Since passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the overall impact to the river, as a result of the publicity surrounding the acquisition of so much public land has had a huge unintended negative effect on water quality, erosion, and pollution due to over usage.
- Move the zebra mussel check point back to Arcola sandbar to help congestion.
- Restrict camping to 7 days.
- Apparently one of the issues the NPS is spending our tax dollars on is to study the effects of overnight camping and the waste that may be generated by such behavior. Could you please tell me why there are hundreds, even thousands of citizens renting canoes to enjoy their day on the river, but no one has provided enough bathroom facilities for this? The for profit business that has a virtual monopoly on canoe rentals should provide portable facilities that are maintained on a regular basis.
- Limit the number of rental canoes available at any given time.
- When zebra mussel station was moved down to high bridge it deprived access to camping and fishing spots.

Suggestions for Camping Management

- The NPS should utilize the land facilities at Osceola Landing to include some canoe-in-only campsites at the southwest corner that are accessible by water only.
- Establish sites in the camping-allowed zones and build pit toilets if possible.
- Eliminate camping except in NPS sites because of the fragility of the Riverway.
- Separate day use from camping sites.
- In favor of a semi-improved and regulated campsite at a place such as Eagle's Nest, provided camping elsewhere along the river from Taylors Falls to Osceola is prohibited and the prohibition is actually enforced.
- No need for additional camping from Taylors Falls to Osceola. There are campgrounds already at Minnesota and Wisconsin Interstate State Parks.
- Camping in any areas except those designated should not be allowed.
- More camping areas are not needed in Minnesota and certainly not on the St. Croix from Taylors Falls to Stillwater.
- We have many areas on which to camp within easy distance of the Twin Cities, and they are not always full.
- Given the heavy day use of the section of river from Taylors Falls to Osceola, the availability of other camping opportunities close by, I fail to understand why there is any camping allowed except at designated sites such as Eagles Nest.
- Would support a proposal for camping in designated sites only and creating more designated campsites like Eagles Nest south of Franconia.
- Camping in designated sites only will send a clear message to a visitor of where this activity should take place. Otherwise there is way too much gray area.
- I would like to see the island across the river from Marine opened up to campers if there could be enough people from the NPS in boats to go check on them.
- Vehemently oppose camping along the St. Croix River, except in already designated spots, like State Parks.
- It's nice that camping is available for people who cannot afford huge boats.

- How about a “camping permit” sold to boaters – the funds could pay for portable toilets on the islands.
- We pay to camp in state parks, why not the Riverway?
- There should be designated sites on shore – people need to stay off private property.
- Issue permits for camping and limit the number.
- Allow camping only where there are toilet facilities provided.
- In my estimation, the river between the high bridge and the Stillwater Bridge can not stand the unregulated camping pressure that currently exists. A limited number of campsites and a system for their use are absolutely necessary.
- Campsites to me seem better now than 10 years ago.
- Managing camping is almost impossible since you don’t even have enough money designated to this problem.
- Have people register to camp and when they are camping, get your people out there to verify who is camping where. When they leave all of their garbage on the island you can send them a bill for trash removal and the next time they try to register they will be red-flagged and not allowed onto our Riverway for the rest of that year.
- Sell a camping permit for a day – week – season like the National Parks do.
- Many rivers managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the west have solved these problems effectively without spoiling the experience – in fact, they have enhanced it. Techniques include permits, human waste carry-out, location restrictions and strict enforcement. The system works and is taken very seriously.
- It would be shame to require camping permits.
- If the number of sites is limited, it would appear that a reservation system would be needed.
- NPS should be able to charge a fee.
- Reservations would kill off the fun of a spontaneous decision to pack up gear and head out on the river for an overnight.
- Mix social and more private camping.
- Camping is better than anything below Stillwater.
- Zone the river. Have different rules and uses for each zone (i.e. Stillwater to Arcola, Arcola to Taylors Falls)
- Need to keep camping and house boating. They are important family traditions.
- Park stickers for river users.
- No to designated sites.

Planning Process

- Meetings needed to be better advertised. Work with marinas. Use their mailings.
- Talk to people/campers during the summer when they are out on the river.
- This study (camping) may be one of the most important in terms of impact on an environment with a rapidly growing population.